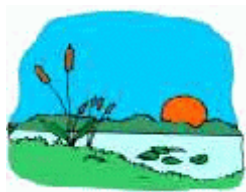


Wetlands

What is a wetland?



Wetlands are the link between land and water, where the flow of water, the cycling of nutrients and the energy of the sun meet to produce a unique ecosystem characterized by hydrology, hydric soils, and vegetation. Wetlands may not be wet all year long and some of the most important wetlands are seasonally dry.



Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands provide water quality benefits such as nutrient uptake, floodwater storage, habitat for flora and fauna, groundwater recharge, support fisheries, and offer opportunities for education and recreation. Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs.



How much water is actually in a wetland?

An acre of wetland can store 1 to 1.5 million gallons of floodwater.



How many wetlands are there in the United States?

In the 1600's over 220 million acres of wetlands existed in the lower 48 states. As of 1997, the contiguous United States supports an estimated 105.5 million acres of wetlands, or an area the size of California.

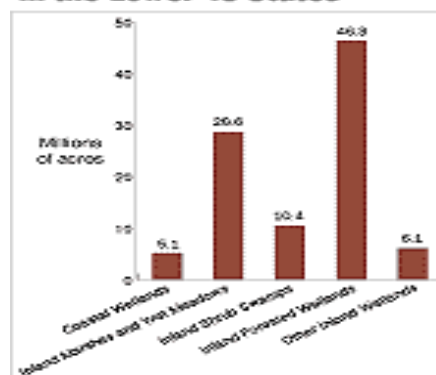
What states have the most wetlands?

Alaska 170 million acres
Florida 11 million acres
Louisiana 8.8 million acres
Minnesota 8.7 million acres
Texas 7.6 million acres

What Region 3 state has the most wetlands?

In Region 3, Virginia has the highest acreage of wetlands with over one million acres, followed by Pennsylvania with almost half a million acres, Maryland, with 440,000 acres, Delaware with 216,000 acres, and West Virginia with 102,000 acres.

**Extent of Wetlands
in the Lower 48 States**



In each Region 3 state, what percentage wetlands have been lost between 1780 and 1980?

**Percentage of Wetlands Acreage Lost,
1780's-1980's**



Twenty-two states have lost at least 50 percent of their original wetlands. Seven states—Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Iowa, California, and Ohio—have lost over 80 percent of their original wetlands. Since the 1970's, the most extensive losses of wetlands have been in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina.
Source: Minsh and Gosselink, Wetlands, 2nd Edition, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993

Maryland 73%
Delaware 54%
Virginia 42%
West Virginia 24%
Pennsylvania 56%

What causes wetland loss?



Wetland losses can be caused by drainage, deposition of fill material, damming, logging, mining, construction, runoff, pollutants, non-native species, erosion, and drought.



How does the EPA help protect wetlands?

Through the Clean Water Act Section 404 regulatory program, EPA protects several hundred acres of wetlands each year from development. Where impacts are unavoidable, compensation is required, often resulting in a net gain of wetland acreage. EPA also manages an effective non-regulatory program, working to create or restore wetlands by partnering with non-government groups, and by awarding grants to state and local agencies.

At the Morris Arboretum in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, three and a half acres of wetlands have been restored through a joint project between EPA and the Pennsylvania DEP. The restored area will not only serve as a functional wetland, but also as a tool to educate the public on the functions and values of wetlands. In addition, training will be provided to municipalities and contractors on accomplishing wetlands restoration.

What can you do to protect wetlands?

Plant native grasses or trees as buffers along wetlands on or near your property to protect water quality. Limit the amount of chemicals applied to your lawn to reduce polluted runoff into wetlands. Learn more about wetlands and volunteering by visiting the following website:

www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/monitor/#vol

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